

Shaken Sifted and Split

by Anton Bosch

This sermon delves into the passage in Luke 22 where Jesus predicts Peter's denial and emphasizes the importance of being tested, the power of Jesus' intercession, the call to strengthen others after restoration, understanding our weaknesses, and the need for unity and obedience in the church amidst challenging times.

Scripture: Luke 22:31, 2 Corinthians 13:5, 1 Peter 4:17, Amos 5:4

Topics: "Testing and Restoration", "Unity in the Church"

Description

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Transcript

Luke chapter 22, Luke chapter 22 and we'll just read verses 31 through 34. So we're in the upper room and Jesus has instituted the Lord's Supper or Communion and he is talking with his disciples, they're arguing about who is the greatest, and in that context, in the sense of them saying, well, you know, I'm greater than you are, who's going to sit on the left, who's going to sit on the right? Jesus' response is in verse 31, and the Lord said, Simon, Simon, indeed Satan has asked for you that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prepared for, I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail. And when you have returned to me, strengthen your brethren.

But he said to him, Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death. And then he said, I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny me, deny three times that you know me. So I was going to deal with more of the passage and yesterday I had to speak to the church in Brisbane in Australia and the Lord had laid on my heart to speak about sifting.

Unfortunately, I had been a little busy and I'd compartmentalized these two messages and never realized that there was a massive overlap, that in fact, the first verse of the passage for this morning was in fact the key to the passage or to the ministry yesterday. So I'm going to cover the same ground for those who watch online. I'm going to cover basically the same ground as I did yesterday.

I don't make a habit of preaching the same message twice. In fact, I don't like it. Fortunately, they never come out the same.

But for those who are watching online, if you heard yesterday's message, this is why. I believe this is the Lord's doing. I don't believe it's pure coincidence that, because I never had this passage in mind when I looked to the Lord for the message for Brisbane.

And so I had that message, which was running parallel to this one. And my mind never brought the two together until I began to... I was in the final stages of preparation yesterday afternoon. So Jesus's response to Peter and to the others who are arguing about their greatness is, he's trying to bring them down to earth.

And he's saying to them, you know, you want to argue about who's on the left and who's on the right. But he says, you're going to be tested. And he then predicts that Simon would, or Peter would, deny him three times before the rooster would crow.

So this is a bit of a comedown from, you know, I want to be on the right. I want to be on the left. You know, who's greater? And Jesus says, that's not your issue right now.

Your issue is that you're all going to run away from me. And Peter, you will deny me. And so, of course, this is quite a letdown from them hoping Jesus would say, well, you know, here's my Oscars list.

Number one, number two, number three. No, Jesus says, you will all forsake me. And so Jesus says to Peter, Satan has asked for you that he may sift you as wheat.

Notice that the devil cannot do what God does not permit. We get this very clearly, of course, in the book of Job. Job, Satan comes to God and says, well, you know, the Lord says, have you seen my servant Job? There's no one like him.

He is upright in all these ways. And the devil says, you just wait. Just give me a chance, and I'll prove to you that Job is not all that you think he is.

Obviously, the devil didn't quite understand God's omniscience, God's ability to know everything. And God says, all right, you go ahead. And so he begins, and God allows Satan to go to a certain point and then further, but God sets the boundaries.

So the devil often is the tool that, or the individual who does the of sifting. And there's a tremendous overlap between this and the passage that we dealt with on Thursday night when we spoke about suffering. God does not always cause the suffering.

He does not always cause the testing. Sometimes he may, but oftentimes it's the devil. But God allows it.

God permits it in order to achieve his purpose. And we say, well, why does God have to test? Or why does he have to allow the devil to test? And of course, when he speaks about sifting, I'm using the word testing, but that's really the purpose of sifting. Sifting, you put something, whether it's flour or whether it's rocks, in a sieve, and you shake it, and certain ones will fall through, and the rest will remain.

It's a way of separating between big and small, generally. But the context in which Jesus uses this is really in the sense of wheat that has been winnowed, and the wheat is now being sifted to select out the good parts from maybe the little pebbles and stuff that may have been left behind. Remember that in winnowing, and we have this in the beginning of Luke and in Matthew also, that John speaks about Jesus's winnowing fork being in his hand.

So they throw the wheat up in the air, and the trash blows away, and the rest falls down. The weighty stuff, which is generally the wheat, falls down. But there may also be pebbles and other things that are in between the wheat, which is not lighter than the chaff, and so that falls with the wheat.

So even though all the chaff is blown away, you still have impurities amongst the wheat. Now the wheat has to be sifted. This is the next part of the process.

And so he is saying, Satan wants to test you. Why then does God allow Satan to test us? Well, because everything needs to be tested. It's not like God doesn't know.

Remember I said a moment ago that even before the devil asked for Job, God knew what the result would be. God knew what the result would be with Peter. And in fact, Jesus makes predictions, and he says, when you have been restored.

In other words, you're going to fall, but when you've been restored, strengthen your brethren. So Jesus knew what was going to happen. The problem is that we don't know what is going to happen, and the problem is that we don't know what is inside of us.

You see, again, remember the context. They're arguing about greatness. They're saying, Lord, I deserve to be, well, I guess, fourth in line in the kingdom, father, son, spirit, and then me.

I mean, that's literally how they saw themselves, fourth in line in the kingdom of God. And Jesus says, no, you don't even know what's in your heart. You don't even know how fickle you are and how frail you are.

And so we need to be tested to reveal our own hearts to ourselves, not so that we would look down on ourselves, but that we might find our strength in him, and that we might learn certain lessons in that process of struggling. And so there is a sifting coming on Simon and on, in fact, all of the disciples. In 1 Peter 4, verse 17, Peter says—and remember, we touched on Peter and the suffering on Thursday again—for the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God.

The judgment here is not eternal judgment, and it's not judgment in the sense of the white throne judgment or the beamer seat of rewards. This is testing. The Greek word for judgment and for testing is the same root word.

And so when something is tested, when something—and remember that the testing has two purposes. The one is to prove what it is—we dealt with this on Thursday—and the second is to purify in that process. And so judgment must begin, separation, division, must begin at the house of God.

And if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey? So if it's going to be tough for us to pass the test, he's saying, then what about those who are unbelievers? Those who do not obey the gospel of God are unbelievers. Now, if the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear? So remember that in the context of the gospel of Luke, we have just transitioned—and it's obviously taken us a long time—but from Jesus' popularity to him now being with the twelve. And so for three years, he's been preaching.

For three years, thousands and thousands of people have followed him. And they followed him all the way from Galilee down to Jerusalem. Obviously, they were all coming to the feast anyhow, but they're traveling in a caravan with Jesus.

And every day as they're coming closer to Jerusalem, Jesus is preaching to them. He's been preaching to them in these last few days in Jerusalem, every day in the temple. And there are literally thousands following him.

Now it's down to the twelve. And the next day, as Jesus would be crucified, or be tried and then crucified, those thousands—remember that he feeds five thousand at one stage—those thousands will be sifted, will be tested, and very little will remain. How many remained? How many went through the cross? And remember, they didn't even get to hang on the cross.

He was the one who was crucified. But people just didn't want to identify with Jesus. The cross became the point of separation, became the sieve, if you will, that separated.

And they are separated, and how many are left after the cross? Well, about five hundred, maybe six hundred. You say, well, where do you get that number? Well, in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, when Paul speaks about the resurrection, part of his proof for the resurrection is that he was seen by the twelve, and then he says he was seen by about five hundred brethren. These were in Galilee.

Now there may have been as many as a hundred and twenty in the upper room who saw him there, and then five hundred, so maybe six hundred, somewhere between five hundred and six hundred people were left after the cross, from thousands. You see, this is the point that Jesus is saying. Jesus is saying the crowds will be tested.

He doesn't say that, but that's inferred, because that night they would all fall away from him. The next day they would stand before Pilate, and they will cry, crucify him, crucify him, give us Barabbas. And so the sifting had come to the people of Israel.

And so we know in Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, let no one deceive you by any means, for that day will not come unless the falling away comes first. And the man of sinners revealed the son of perdition. Now I'm not going to get into the eschatology and how these things fit into the end times, but one of the things that we clearly see at the end of time is the great falling away.

Now nothing I'm saying today I've not said in the last two years. So I'm simply putting it all together in one go and hoping to remind us of these truths. And so there is the falling away, and notice it is not a falling away, it's the falling away.

There have always been those who have apostatized, always been those who've fallen away from the faith. Remember even in Paul's ministry, there were those who departed from Paul. There were those who left for the world.

There were those who, in his letters to Timothy, he speaks about those who even were elders in the church of Ephesus who had turned away from the faith and had turned to false doctrines. And so there's always been a falling away, but he is saying there's going to be the falling away, a great unprecedented apostasy at the end time. And I've said to you before that I believe that we are seeing the beginning of that great apostasy.

We're seeing a sifting going on in the church today, and it's been going certainly for the last two years since the beginning of COVID. I think that COVID has been one of the tools that has been used in the sifting process, but it started before that, maybe the last five years. But what we're seeing is an increasing and an intensifying of this falling away.

And so why is it happening? Because God is sifting. God is shaking. The book of Hebrews chapter 12, we'll get to that in some time when we get to that part of the book of Hebrews, speaks about a shaking, when God is going to shake not just the earth but the heavens also.

And the purpose of the shaking is that that which may remain will remain. In other words, if the olive trees outside, if we didn't spray them to kill the fruit, if we allowed them to fruit, what would happen? How do they harvest those olives? They take the tree and they shake it. And nowadays they have big machines, tractors that come in and they grab the tree and they put a net out underneath it and they shake that tree so that everything that is loose in that tree is going to fall down.

Hopefully the ripe fruit will fall down. But God is shaking and he's testing to see what is going to stand. The same way as an earthquake tests the buildings.

And we know how that in the earthquakes, the big and the bad earthquakes, it's the weak buildings that fall down. The ones that are being properly constructed are able to stand. So God is shaking.

And he is shaking not just the world, he's shaking the church right now. And so what is happening is that many are falling away. Many churches are closing down.

Now I'm not speaking about false churches. There are many, many false churches. But there are good, legitimate churches, Bible teaching, Bible believing churches, but they are closing down at an unprecedented rate.

And as I said to you, COVID has been part of the problem, because many churches closed down during the time of COVID, went to Zoom meetings, and many of those churches have never reopened and will never reopen again. And we say, well, that's COVID. No, this is part of a global thing that's going on.

There's a spiritual thing behind this. And so churches are closing down. Churches are defecting from the faith in that they are getting into false teachings and false doctrines, again, at an unprecedented rate.

Church leaders are falling away. There is not a week anymore. And we've spoken about this so many times, and yet it seems that it's just accelerating at a rate that is dizzying.

Every week I'm reading about another pastor who has fallen into immorality, or stolen money, or got into false doctrine. Those three things. And as I said, there's always been a falling away, but never like this.

And you know, I wasn't born yesterday. I've been preaching for 50 years now, over 50 years now, and I've never seen this. Maybe once a year you'll hear about a pastor over there that ran off with his secretary, or that one who put his hand in the cookie jar.

But now it's every week. Something is happening. And there is a sifting going on.

There is a shaking going on. So churches are being affected. Leaders are being affected.

And individual Christians are being affected. Again, when we speak about COVID, there is almost—and I thank God for our church—that it has not affected us, that I can detect. Yes, we lost at the beginning of the COVID thing.

We lost the hangers-on. We had a whole bunch of hangers-on. People who had been coming here for years, wouldn't get their lives right, continue to live in sin, and all those kinds of things, they stopped

coming, and they never came back.

And that's fine. That's part of the sifting. We don't want to lose anyone.

We want everyone to be saved. We want everyone to be part. But unfortunately, there are those who really don't have the right intentions, and they get sifted out.

And we have to accept it. Now, the sifting is not a bad thing, because the purpose is to end up with what is good. You're not going to take the wheat with the stones and the twigs and the whatever it is, and just grind it all together and make bread.

You have to get the real stuff out. And God is building a church, and he is purifying a bride for himself that is without spot and without blemish. And so those things that soil and bring contaminants into the body of Christ, he is sifting those out.

But at the same time, there are many genuine believers. And again, I'm not wanting to get into the theology as to whether these people were never saved or whether they were saved and they fell away. That's besides the point right now.

The fact is that there are many that we believed in churches that were saved, and that are no longer going to church. And COVID was part of that process. That's where I was a minute ago.

And what's happened in many churches is that because they went online, people chose to remain online. In other words, continue to watch virtually, even when the churches opened again, those people never came back again. And they're sitting at home, watching the service on the television.

And so believers, and you say, well, they're still believers. Well, they may be, but here's the problem. God has made a plan for us.

And his plan is the body of Christ is the church. And we need the church. Yes, we thank God for technology.

And we can, we can have meetings on zoom as we had for a few months at one point. And we thank God for that, for the technology that I was able to preach in the church in Brisbane yesterday and preaching in Scotland on Thursday and, and so on. We thank God for that.

But that can never replace face to face fellowship where Christians interact with one another, encourage one another, exhort one another, care for one another, pray for one another, worship together, hear the word of God together. That was God's intention. That is what God designed.

He never designed Christianity to be a lone star exercise. Me and my small corner, we used to have a chorus to that effect. And so I'm there in my little closet and I'm watching YouTube.

That was, that, that is not God's intention for us. And yes, there are those who are watching this morning who do not have access to a good church and use and listen to us and listen to other good preachers. And that's fine.

But there are many who have chosen not to even bother to try and find a good church and choose to remain at home. And one has to wonder how long will, how long will that last? So there's a shaking. Now, I want to talk very quickly about the main areas in which the, the falling away is happening.

The first one is in the area, and this is not necessarily in any order, but the first one I want to deal with is the issue of doctrine. I can't believe the nonsense that Christians are getting into these days. And part of the problem is the internet, because you can log on and you, and you know how it goes.

You, you, you have a trusted preacher and you listen to that trusted preacher, and it comes to the end of the video. And YouTube, if you don't change your settings, will do what? It'll offer you the next video. But the next video is random.

It's connected in some way to what you were watching. So if you were watching something about the second coming, you'll be offered something about the second coming. But who knows who that guy is? He may be a heretic, but people watch, people listen, and it changes their ideas.

And so doctrine has become a problem. It's become a problem for churches, it's become a problem for preachers, and it's become a problem for believers. And I've spoken to you how many times about men that I used to walk with, who have turned to this harebrained doctrine, and this crazy idea, and that crazy idea.

And I don't even want to count it, because it's, it's too discouraging. How many have fallen away that I know, and as I said to you, I don't know many people. And yet of those that I know, how many have fallen away this last, in this last year? One's gone off in that direction, another one's gone off in that direction.

And at least two of them have rejected the idea of church entirely, doctrine. The second area is the area of sin and immorality. Now remember, I'm applying this to churches, leaders, and believers.

And churches have fallen into sin. You say, well how can a church fall into sin, when the church condones sin amongst them? Remember that was a problem in Corinth. Paul says, a little leaven leavens the whole lump.

You should have dealt with this issue, but in fact what you've done, not only have you tolerated it, but you have approved of it. This man who did this terrible thing. And churches are approving of all kinds of sin and immorality.

Homosexuality, adultery, drug addiction, drunkenness, the list goes on and on and on. Fraud, tax fraud. Churches are not just approving these things, they are sometimes encouraging these things.

I don't believe that they ever were a genuine church, but I think we've all heard about Hillsong, one of the biggest, fastest growing groups of churches in the world. Well they were until very recently. For those who get Discovery Plus, I don't know if anyone does, but Discovery Plus has just done, Discovery Plus is a streaming service, has just done a three-part series, and you know I watched the last two on Friday night.

They have a culture of immorality. A culture. It's not just odd individuals, this is systemic immorality, child abuse, financial fraud.

And these are things that have been proven. Substantiated. And yet we say this is a church.

In fact, the interesting thing is, I mustn't get sidetracked, the interesting thing is that they confess by their own confession they are not a church. How do they do that? Because all of their churches in America are not registered as 501c3s or as churches or as charities. They are registered as LLCs, limited liability corporations.

So by their own confession they are a business, not a church. Now that's an extreme example, and yet that same thing exists in Bible teaching, Bible believing churches. Folks, the stuff that is coming out about many churches, churches that you know about in this city, are horrifying.

Systemic child abuse, systemic abuse of women, and the churches cover it up. They protect the men and they shame the women. What's happened? Something has gone wrong.

God is testing churches, leaders, and believers on the issue of sin. Lukewarmness. You say, well, that's not so bad.

We talk about adultery and fraud or pedophilia. Yeah, those are terrible things, but lukewarmness, that's okay, you know, you're still sort of more or less there. You know what Jesus has to say about that.

He says, I'll vomit you out. I mean, that's just... And folks, here's the problem. It seems to me that the churches, the leaders, and the believers who have not been affected by false doctrine, who have not been affected by sin, have been affected by lukewarmness.

There is an apathy that has come into the preaching, that has come into the churches, that has come into the lives of believers. Yeah, we still go to church, we still do the religious thing, we still believe, but there is no zeal for the house of God. There is no fire, there is no commitment, there is no dedication.

It's just one of the things that we do, and if we feel good, we'll go to church. If we don't feel good, we won't. And even when we do, we're sort of half there, but we're not really there.

But lukewarmness, I have never seen this in the many years that I've served the Lord. And again, I'm not going to get into specifics. Rebellion.

Rebellion against the teaching of God's Word. Rebellion against God's Word. Rebellion against those that God has set as teachers and as leaders in the church.

And you say, well, what are you talking about? What I'm talking about is the book of Judges. You remember that in the book of Judges three times, it says that every man did what was right in his own eyes. And it doesn't say that in a good sense, it says it in a negative sense.

And folk, we live in the time of the judges. Everyone has become an expert on theology, has become an expert on morality, and has become a law unto himself. And so people are unteachable.

I don't know how many times I get comments on my videos of people who cannot even write English, but they want to criticize my theology. If you can't even write English, and I'm not talking about second language speakers here, I'm talking about people for whom English is their first language. And they can't even write English, but they want to criticize my theology.

Folk, please. And this is not about education. But if you want to judge and criticize my theology, you better know a few things.

You better know that there's a difference between an Arminian and an Arminian. And I know maybe some don't understand that. Look it up.

Every man doing what's right in his own eyes. Folk, people are leaving churches because they think that they know better than the pastor. Now, I know there are pastors that are half-baked and that shouldn't be

in the pulpit.

I understand that. I understand that there are pastors who don't have a clue what they're talking about. I come across them all the time.

But if you find yourself in a good church, then submit to those that God has set in that church. And I'm not talking about it in an occultic way. Division.

Division in churches. Folk, churches have and are continuing to divide on whether you wear a mask or don't wear a mask. Entire churches are split down the middle on whether you vax or don't vax.

And we're not even talking about splitting on doctrine. We're talking about splitting on things that are relatively unimportant. They may be important to you, but they are no basis for division.

I've likened it to Romans chapter 14, things offered to idols, but it's not even at that level. It's at the level of whether you're going to wear a tie this morning or not. And there are churches that will, and people who will divide on whether you wear a tie or not.

And again, we're not encouraging preachers to be wearing torn jeans and t-shirts with holes in them, which has become the custom. But dividing on whether we wear a mask or don't wear a mask. If I told you five years ago that churches will divide over the issue of having a vaccine, before we knew about COVID, just a vaccine.

Remember, we've always had vaccines for measles and mumps and rubella and polio and all sorts of things. If I told you five years ago, that entire churches, not just one or two, but wholesale, will split and divide over whether you have a vaccine or not, you would have told me, you're crazy, it'll never happen. And yet that's exactly what's happening today.

God is shaking the church. He is testing, and churches are dividing, and Christians are dividing on unimportant issues. Yes, we must divide on the important issues, on the essentials of the faith.

We must divide if someone denies the Trinity, someone denies the eternity of Jesus, that Jesus is eternal. We must divide when someone denies the sufficiency of Scripture. These are, there are basic things that we must divide on.

But when we begin to divide on things like masks and vaccines, we're in serious, serious trouble. And then the final one, and there are many others, politics and Christian nationalism has come into the church in a way that we never anticipated. And America has replaced God.

The flag has replaced the worship of God. The Constitution has substituted the Word of God for many, many, many Christians, churches, and preachers. It is idolatry.

I'm not against you being loyal to the country. There are those here who have fought for this country and for this flag, and we appreciate their service. I fought for my country and my flag many years, but when that becomes my God, when the cross in the church is replaced by the flag, we have a problem.

It's called idolatry. And yet it has entered the evangelical church to such an extent that I am no longer, as you know, willing to be called an evangelical. Because when you speak to the unbelievers about what is an evangelical, they have a totally different idea.

It's someone who votes for a particular party who has set their country above their God. And yeah, I know they say, no, it's God first, and then family, and then country, or whatever it is. No, that's not the way it is.

And so this has come into, and not just in America, it's in England, it's in Australia, it's in many other parts of the world as well. So what are the solutions? We can go on and on and on, and I can rant and rave forever, but I want to get back to our text, and I want to get to the solution. So let me give you some solutions quickly.

The first solution is to check whether, in fact, I'm saved. You say, well, that's insulting. Well, that's what Paul said, 2 Corinthians chapter 13, verse 5. Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith.

But here's the problem. There are many in churches who believe that they are Christians because they signed a decision card, because they prayed the sinner's prayer, because they asked Jesus into their hearts, but they are not born again. We've spoken about this many times.

I'm not going to preach that whole thing again. But by their fruits you will know them, the evidence of their lives, and that's exactly what is happening now. When people begin to do the things that we have spoken about, what they are revealing is their true nature.

And so what do you need to do? What do I need to do? And we say, well, you know, of course I'm saved. That's exactly the point of the text that we're dealing with. Peter says, Lord, they'll all leave you.

Not me. Jesus says, before the cock crows, you'll deny me three times. Not just once, three times.

Folks, it's easy to be a Peter. It's easy to say, Lord, of course I'm saved. And yet Paul says, examine yourself.

And I must examine myself. You say, well, but, you know, I know folks think that this is crazy. This is, you know, of course we're saved.

We're in Sun Valley Community Church after all. Folks, we have, again, I can't get into the history, but we have a generation of people who have been assimilated into churches. They've learned the language.

They've learned the culture and the traditions. They've been baptized. They even stand in pulpits and they are not born again because their lifestyle declares that they are not born again.

So we must ask that question. Am I saved? The second thing is I need to make sure I'm in and remain in a good church. Now, maybe that doesn't apply to those here.

It may apply to those that are online. And again, I understand there are people who live in towns and in cities where there are no good churches. I understand that.

But if at all possible, we need to find other believers, whether it's just one other family that we're able to fellowship with together. Because we cannot, folks, the times when you could maybe make it on your own are past. And I'm not trying to intimidate people to staying into this church or joining this church.

But things have become so difficult. The shaking is so intense that you cannot survive on your own. You need to be part of a group of believers, even if it's just two or three others.

And preferably outside of the family. We need to remain faithful in prayer and in reading. Simple.

Nothing whiz-bang. And yet that's where it begins. We neglect our prayer time.

We neglect our reading and meditating on the scriptures. We must be obedient. We must be obedient.

You see, because if we're disobedient in the small things, we will be disobedient in the big things. And disobedience is often the cause of someone defecting from the faith. Because the moment I'm disobedient, the first thing I do is I begin to justify my disobedience.

And in order to justify my disobedience, I have to twist the Word of God. Because it's the Word of God that declares me to be disobedient. And so if I want to do something that I shouldn't be doing, I take the Word of God and I twist that.

And that ends in false doctrine. I can prove that to you, many examples, but we need to move on. We need to be actively working towards unity in the local church.

Not just not being the cause of dissension, but actively working towards unity. Actively doing what I can to show love and care and concern for others. Actively trying to deal with gossip and to suppress gossip.

Actively trying to get rid of those irritations that causes us to turn away from brothers and sisters. I know it's not easy, but if we're going to survive as a church and if we're going to survive individually, we need one another. And we need to be on the guard for division.

Paul speaks about this in Ephesians chapter 4, where he says that we need to hold the unity, preserve the unity of the faith. All right. Let's get back to the text.

So the Lord says, Simon, Simon, indeed, Satan has asked for you that he may sift you as wheat. And folk, this applies to every one of us. I can put each one of our names in there.

The devil wants us. The devil wants you. There's no ifs, maybes, or buts about that.

But I've prayed for you. And folk, there are the things we have to do and the things that God has to do. We've spoken about this many times.

And I thank God that he is still living to intercede for us. Jesus says to Peter, I've prayed for you. Jesus now ever lives to make intercession for us.

And I believe that right now he is praying for you. He's praying for each one of us. And what is he praying? That your faith should not fail.

That when you are tested, the faith will stand. When you are served, you have not found wanting. Remember the writing on the wall in the book of Daniel.

You've been weighed and been found too light. You've been found coming short. Jesus says, I'm praying that you will not be found to be coming short.

And then he says, when you have returned to me. This is a great encouragement to Peter, but unfortunately, we can't take this as a guarantee for us. But Jesus says, not if you return, but when you return.

And we're going to see this in the next few weeks as we go through the rest of the book of Luke, how that Jesus, how Peter denies the Lord. And then finally in John chapter 21, Jesus meets him at the shore of,

and they have breakfast together. And Jesus says to Peter, do you love me? And Peter is restored.

But there is no guarantee of restoration. There were many in the time of Jesus. Remember the thousands that followed him? In the end, only 500.

The rest were never restored. But when you have returned, strengthen your brethren. Folk, when we go through the trials that we spoke about on Thursday, when you go through the testing and you come out on the other side, you have a responsibility to strengthen your brethren.

And when we look at Peter's epistle that we've quoted from this morning, and we quoted from on Thursday night, Peter is able to encourage the saints in a way that he would never have been able to do had he not denied the Lord Jesus. Because remember what he's dealing with in first Peter, he's dealing with persecution. And he's saying, don't fold under persecution.

Who folded under persecution? Peter did. I don't know the man. Don't know who he is.

And so Peter is speaking from a position of experience when he says, arm yourselves, brace yourselves for suffering. And folk, unless you've been tested, it's very hard to encourage others. Because it's easy to say, well, brother, just why are you struggling? But when we have been tested, we know what it's like.

Just like our faithful high priest in the book of Hebrews, who in every point was tested like we are. He was tested yet without sin. And so he's able to encourage us because he was tested.

And when we are tested and we come out the other side, we have a responsibility and we have the equipment to strengthen one another, to strengthen the brethren. Verse 33, and he said to him, Peter said, Lord, I'm ready to go with you both to prison and to death. And then Jesus said, I tell you, Peter, the wrist shall not grow this day before you will deny me three times or deny three times that you know me.

Based on the passage in Luke, the first thing is we will be tested. The second thing is that he is praying for us. The third point is that when we have been restored, when we've come through the testing, we need to strengthen our brethren.

And the final point is, understand your weakness. Now this is 180 degree polar opposite of what is taught in positive thinking churches. You need to know your potential.

No, you need to know your weakness. And your potential for failure. You say, well, that's not a very positive message.

No, it is a positive message because when I understand my potential for failure, I'm driven to Christ. And I said, Lord, I can't do it, but you can. Well, I fear the test.

I fear that the trial, because I don't know if I'll make it, but you can keep me. You can hold me. My confidence is not in me.

Peter's confidence at this point was in himself. Lord, they'll all deny not me. Jesus says, your trust is in the wrong place.

But when we understand our weakness, the things that I've spoken about earlier, when I understand my weakness, I'll spend time in prayer, seeking God's help. I'll spend time in God's word, seeking his counsel. When I understand how fickle I really am, I'll stay in fellowship with other saints who can keep me in line

and who can encourage me and exhort me.

When I understand my own frailty, I will submit to those who God has set as teachers and leaders in the body of Christ. But pride comes before the fall. Father, we thank you for your word.

Lord, these are difficult things to speak about, and yet they are real. And we're seeing these things happen to us every day. And Lord, every time I read about yet another preacher abusing women, committing adultery, stealing money, getting into false doctrine, Lord, I have to ask the question.

Maybe, Lord, it could be me. Lord, I pray that you'd help us to get away from our pride. Our arrogance.

Lord, everyone will forsake you, but I'll never do it. Lord, my doctrine is so secure, I'll never get into false doctrine. But Lord, help us to understand that every one of us is just like Peter.

Every one of us has the potential of even denying the Lord who brought us. But Lord, we pray that you'd keep us close to Jesus. Keep us close to the cross.

Keep us close to your word. Keep us close, Lord, to one another. That Lord, we may not be those who are shaken loose, but Lord, that we may be those who will endure to the end, because it's those who endure to the end that will be saved.

And Lord, we understand that Jesus said that when I return, will I find faith? Will there even be those who are still saved? And Lord, I wonder about that these days. And I wonder, Lord, will I make it? Oh, we don't want to be insecure in our faith. We thank you for your strength.

We thank you for your promises that you are the Alpha and the Omega, the author and the finisher of our faith. But Lord, at the same time, our trust cannot be in ourselves or even in our church. Our trust must be in you.

And we pray, Lord, that you would drive us to yourself, that you would draw us to yourself. Lord, that we may walk carefully, circumspectly, making sure that we are not exposing ourselves. But Lord, that we are walking as close to you as we possibly can as we enter these dark and difficult times.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Lord, we do pray for those who were amongst us and are not here today. Lord, there are many who have turned back to the world.

There are others, Lord, who are lukewarm. There are others that are struggling. And Lord, I pray that you would strengthen them.

I thank you for your intercession, that you are at the right hand interceding for us. But Lord, we pray that you would help us to be intercessors. And Lord, that we would continue to pray and plead for those who were with us at one time and today have rejected you.

Lord, I pray that you would bring them back. Save them, we pray, in Jesus' name. And so, Lord, I pray that these things may be real.

Lord, that you would continue to teach them to us. But above all, Lord, inscribe upon our hearts our need to be very careful about how we live. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Go with us now, Lord. Keep us and protect us. Bring us together again safely on Thursday, we pray, in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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